Joy in serving



Anglican Overseas Aid

Advent Reflection 2026



AUTHOR BIO

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INTRODUCTION

There is a simple joy in being served by others. That feeling you get when someone gets you a cup of coffee just because they thought you needed it.

However, Scriptures teaches us that there is also a deeper and more profound joy - not just in being served but, radically, in serving others.

True joy is not simply a temporary feeling based on good circumstances; it is an expression of the fruit of the Spirit that comes from knowing Christ. When we receive the wonderful love of God in Jesus, it not only brings joy, it also flows outward into service. Serving others is not simply expressing gratitude for God's grace, it is modelling our lives on our Saviour and Lord Indeed, **Advent is the time when we reflect on the one who came not to be served, but to serve, and to do so until he returns.**

As Jesus' followers, this means that serving others becomes a meaningful and joyful act of worship rather than a heavy burden. Caring for the poor, comforting the sad, or supporting those in need shifts the focus away from our selfish desires and instead aligns our hearts with God's priorities.

The call of Advent is to live lives of joyful service as we fix our eyes on our servant-hearted and expectant King.

Costly, joyful service

WEEK ONE

MATTHEW 2:1-12

One of the well-known parts of the Christmas story is the visit of the three wise men. Contrary to popular belief however, we don't know how many wise men there actually were – only that there were three gifts.

The Magi also visited Jesus, not at his birth, but when he was around two years of age. The Magi do, however, offer us a wonderful example of joyful service.

When they finally meet Jesus, the Magi recognise him as the rightful centre of the universe and God's promised Saviour. In stark contrast, King Herod viewed the child as a troubling threat to his own autonomy and power.

This challenge remains relevant today, as we can be tempted to 'crown ourselves king' and remain the masters of our own destiny rather than serving Jesus. The Magi also help us understand what worship is – not just mere intellectual assent, but costly and joyful service.

While Herod will not even travel the short distance from Jerusalem, the Magi sacrificed weeks of travel and their most precious treasures – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – to honour a King they believed was worthy of their best.

When the Magi see Jesus, they are so joyful that Matthew needs four words to describe their elation – they literally **'Rejoiced, with joy, with great joy, exceedingly!'** May we have such a reaction!



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In what specific areas of your life are you tempted to 'crown yourself king' rather than allowing Jesus to be at the centre?

If worship is shaped by joyful sacrifice, what do your current priorities around time and money reveal about who or what you are truly worshipping?

How does the fact that the King of the universe came to serve you and give his life for you change your perspective on serving him?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Your son, the Lord Jesus Christ is the true King of the universe, who humbled himself for our sake. We confess that far too often we are tempted to crown ourselves king, protecting our autonomy and self-interest rather than worshipping you.

Like the Magi, help us to not only recognise Jesus as our Lord, but also allow for our joy to overflow into worship and active service. Fill our hearts with exceeding joy as we follow the one who accepted us when we deserved rejection.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Serving against all odds

'I do not look upon my parents to take care of my basic needs. I make enough to support myself, and at times, even support them.'

The words belong to Stephen, a 30-year-old farming mentor and community leader in Kenya. With the assistance of AOA's partner the Diocese of Mt Kenya West, Stephen is extending his economic empowerment to other people in his community.

The region Stephen calls home is arid and dry, deeply affected by climate change. Growing up in a vulnerable family, he faced more obstacles than most. Particularly after polio left him with a permanent physical disability.

But where others might have seen limitations, Stephen spotted possibilities. **As a young boy, he used his wheelchair to fetch water for people in his community – much needed in an area enduring long, persistent droughts.**

When he got older, Stephen became an advocate for disability inclusion. He conducted awareness campaigns and arranged community forums. He challenged stigma and promoted the rights of persons with disabilities.

Stephen also formed a group offering support to other people with disabilities. Today, this group has grown to 27 people. AOA's partner has assisted them to establish kitchen gardens which have improved household nutrition and resilience against climate-related food shortages. Thank you for giving to enable this!

The transformation, however, goes beyond livelihoods. The members of the group have developed greater confidence. They depend less on external support. Or as Stephen says: 'I make enough to support myself.' His story is a beautiful testimony to how we can serve and create impact, regardless of our circumstances. It's a story of courage and faith. Of what is possible when the body of Christ works together.



Afraid, yet filled with joy

WEEK TWO

MATTHEW 28:1-15

Matthew 28:1-15 highlights the journey of a small group of brave women who go from mourning to a mission. It is a wonderful story of how the joy of seeing the resurrected Jesus Christ directly fuels active service. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary initially approached the tomb expecting to 'face death' and perform the customary service of preserving a shrine with spices.

However, finding the tomb empty transformed their religious duty into a joyful encounter with the living Jesus.



Their joy is described as a complex mix of being 'afraid yet filled with joy'. **This was not a passive emotion; it immediately led into urgent service as they hurried away and ran to tell his disciples the good news.**

At the birth of Jesus, we see the same 'active joy' in the shepherds in the fields around Betlehem. Their fear gives way to joy after the angel's announcement of the birth of a saviour. After visiting the infant Jesus, they spread the word about the child – and all who heard it were amazed.

True joy cannot be contained. It compels believers to not only worship Jesus but also to proclaim the event that changed the world. For the women and the shepherds, joy and praise became the bridge between seeing an empty tomb - or an empty night sky - and becoming the first messengers of the Gospel.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do the ‘fear and joy’ of the women challenge the idea that spiritual joy should always feel comfortable or easy?

In what ways should your own joy and service reflect a relationship with a living person rather than just a set of religious rules or traditions?

What ‘urgent news’ of the joyful hope of the resurrection are you currently being called to ‘run and tell’ others in your own life?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We praise you for the life-changing reality of the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. Grant us the grace of those first brave women, who moved from expecting death to encountering life. May we share their ‘fear and joy,’ being so captured by the good news of the resurrection of Jesus that we cannot help but run to tell others.

We thank you for the victory of the resurrection in confirming our forgiveness and securing our hope against death and evil. Help us to clasp the feet of our Saviour in worship and may the truth of Jesus’ victory that we may seek to turn our world from chaos into a place of your justice.

Amen.

From harming to serving

Kenneth was living a destructive lifestyle and eventually his choices led to a prison sentence. In prison, a fellow inmate introduced him to AOA's Ugandan partner, Wise Choices For Life, and things began to shift. Today, Kenneth serves his community as a pastor and medical clinical officer. He has gone from harming his community to serving it.

'Back then, there was turmoil and lack of direction,' Kenneth says. 'My behaviours created problems without lasting solutions.'

Even in prison, Kenneth's challenges continued and he was plotting revenge against his girlfriend. **But when another inmate introduced him to the WCFL club, everything changed.** 'I learned wonderful topics, such as my identity in Christ, life skills and values, decision-making and critical thinking. I received knowledge I really needed,' Kenneth says.

Your generous gift provided an opportunity for Kenneth to experience a deep, personal change.

> ***'Now that I am released, I am happy. I make good decisions, and I am serving as a pastor who values God.'***

Kenneth is one of thousands of people who come in contact with Wise Choices For Life during their prison sentence. The inmates say they learn better anger management and communication. They speak of returning home as reformed fathers. One man said the training helped him counsel another inmate away from suicide.

Thank you for partnering with AOA and Wise Choices For Life to share the good news with power to transform lives like Kenneth's.



'Imarisha Maisha' receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

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‘The joy set before him’

WEEK THREE

HEBREWS 12:1-3

Our culture often equates joy with the avoidance of pain; however, the example of Jesus offers a radical alternative. His joy was not found in comfort or the absence of suffering. Indeed, from his humble birth in a stable to enduring death on a cross, Jesus illustrated the ultimate acts of service.

Hebrews 12 tells us that ‘for the joy set before him, Jesus was able to scorn the shame of the cross and endure opposition from sinners. This joy was the motivation for His service – the knowledge that His sacrifice would pay the ransom for broken lives and bring about the health and flourishing of God’s children.

Notice too how Jesus is described as the ‘pioneer and perfecter of faith’.

In other words, he serves as the perfect model for how we are to live as God’s children.

Jesus teaches us that the joy experienced by the Magi or the women at the tomb is often found through endurance and sacrifice.

Just as an athlete undergoes rigorous training in a gymnasium to grow stronger, Jesus’ endurance was a purposeful path that led to his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.



The tinsel, the candles and the wrapping paper are all part of the joy of the season, but the joy we have in Christ runs so much deeper. True joy in service is discovered when we ‘fix our eyes on Jesus’ rather than on our comfort or on other shiny things that sometimes distract us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How does Jesus' ability to endure the cross 'for the joy set before him' challenge your personal definition of happiness?

In your current acts of service, are you 'fixing your eyes on Jesus' or are you focused on the immediate cost and discomfort?

How might reflecting on this passage help reframe your own challenges or those of others to enable you to be more joyful in service?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you are deeply concerned for our holiness and flourishing. We confess that we often make a god of our own comfort, seeking to avoid all pain and growing weary of serving others when trials come. Above all, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

May we consider him who endured the cross for the joy set before him, so that we may not lose heart but rather be renewed with a desire to serve you and others with the strength and joy you provide.

Amen.

Serving the next generation

School principal Laurenço sees the tragic pattern repeat itself all too often. Early marriages and teenage pregnancies force young girls to drop out of the education system.

In rural Mozambique, it's the sad result of economic pressure and traditional teachings, including local initiation rites.

AOA's partner, the Diocese of Nampula, reported that the students at Laurenço's school lacked decision-making power and knowledge about their rights. But then the diocese introduced the 'Studies for Life' program. **Now groups of students are trained in health, leadership and rights.** It is increasing their ability to make informed decisions about their futures.

Principal Laurenço shares how he feels transformed and motivated. Himself the father of four children, he can see change for families directly.

'I am happy to have this program integrated into the school,' he says.

> ***'I am sure it will bring changes to the community. The board and the parents are already expressing great satisfaction with the program. They promise to support and guide their children to embrace the teachings.'***

The various topics discussed in the weekly sessions now echo daily in the school corridors. But the conversations also continue outside the building, reaching homes and the community at large.

Thank you for giving Principal Laurenço the tools to fight child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Thank you for your servanthood to the next generation.



'Towards Abundant Life for All' receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)

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Singing for joy

WEEK FOUR

JUDE 1:24-25

The book of Jude calls believers to the difficult and costly service of contending for the gospel and acting in mercy toward those led astray. However, the letter's concluding doxology reveals that our service is sustained by God's prior and personal commitment to us.

Jude shifts the focus from our effort to the astonishing truth that God contends for us by keeping us from stumbling.

One of the most surprising elements of this doxology is the 'wild joy' that accompanies God's action. **When God presents his people before his glorious presence, it is not a solemn moment, but rather a moment of ecstatic delight and exuberant celebration.**

It is the image of a proud parent or the father of the prodigal son. Jude describes a God who is utterly delighted to see us, even singing for joy over us according to Zephaniah 3:17.



This joy is rooted in his 'Godness', his glory, majesty, power, and authority which ensures that his work of rescuing and keeping his children is eternal and unbreakable.

Ultimately, our service and praise are a response to being called, loved, and kept by a Saviour who never stops working on our behalf.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Jude describes God as presenting you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. How does this image change how you approach serving God and others, even in difficult and costly circumstances?

If your ability to stand before God depends entirely on his 'power and authority' to make you 'without fault,' how does that release you from the pressure of perfectionism or laziness in your call to joyful service?

In what ways can you 'keep yourself in God's love' while simultaneously trusting that it is Jesus who is truly 'holding you' as you seek to love and serve him?

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Though we are aware of our many blemishes and defects, we thank you that through the blood of Christ, you present us without fault–pure, perfect, and holy in your sight.

We marvel at the amazing truth that you will one day cause us to stand in your glorious presence with joy.

Grant us the grace to grasp the joy you have for us. May it lead us to joyful service. May your glory, majesty, power, and authority be our anchor, knowing that your saving work began before all ages and will continue forevermore.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Serving today's Mary

'Leaving my house was not an easy decision. It's difficult to be far from home, but the situation called for me to leave. I have a small child, and my husband is a soldier on the frontline.'

Reachitha fled her home last year to escape an escalating border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. When our partner PNKS meets her, she has found her way to a Temporary Displacement Centre, where your support is providing her with food, water and shelter.

Reachitha is one of more than half a million civilians forced to leave homes and livelihoods because of the conflict.

These people face severe heat exposure, limited shade, water shortages and insufficient sanitation. Psychological distress is also high, especially among women whose husbands are serving on the frontline, and among children separated from their fathers.

Our partner in Cambodia, PNKS, reports that many children are fearful and uncertain about returning home. But thanks to your support, PNKS has given emergency assistance to thousands of refugees, including pregnant women and a five-day-old baby.

Your donations secured food and water. You provided tents, sleeping mats, mosquito nets and hygiene items. You reduced financial stress and reduced psychological distress.

As we approach Christmas and remember how Mary, Joseph and Jesus once had to escape to Egypt, know that your generosity helped Reachitha, and many other mothers and children who were also forced to flee. 'The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,"' Matthew 25:40.



PNKS receives funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

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